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## The Continuing Importance of Ideology in Soviet Foreign Policy

By Allen Lynch

The "end of ideology," proclaimed by sociologist Daniel Bell and many others in the fifties in their analysis of political trends within the Western world, has now come to East-West relations as well. Or so one would believe from the numerous pronouncements in Soviet and Western capitals about the "deideologization" of Soviet foreign policy and East-West relations, the relegation of "class values" to a second order of significance in Soviet international policy, and the exceptionally pragmatic thrust of contemporary Soviet policies, foreign and domestic. Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze has time and again made clear to *internal* Soviet audiences composed of the Foreign Ministry staff and Soviet diplomatic corps the priority of what he has termed "common sense" over the reduction of phenomena and interests to ideological considerations.<sup>1</sup> Soviet political observers, who have always encouraged the borrowing of Western technical accomplishments, now speak openly of "the need to assimilate the entire positive baggage of [Western] political thought...all of the humane and effective forms of its social structure, its entire rich experience in solving social and national problems." Has not Gorbachev himself forcefully stated that the Soviet leadership is striving "to expunge ideological prejudice from our policy"? Even the state examination in Marxism-Leninism was abolished in all Soviet universities in early 1990.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the dramatic progress in East-West relations since 1985, which includes across-the-board improvement in Soviet external relationships, startling reversals in past Soviet military and arms control policies, and most

striking, the laissez-faire policy toward Eastern Europe, culminating in the collapse of communist authority throughout the region, clearly reflect a decline in the level and character of ideologically driven hostility in Soviet foreign policy and East-West relations as a whole.

Before addressing the nature of this change, it is fair to consider both its political and analytical significance. After all, regardless of the motivations involved, the observable shift in the center of gravity of Soviet policy has enabled East-West relations to move on issues and in fields long thought to be intractable or not susceptible to political and diplomatic intervention. Many in the West — and the East — are happy to exploit all existing opportunities for improved relationships, whether of ideological provenance or simply a coincidence of short- to medium-term political interests. And who can blame them? As U.S. Secretary of State James Baker has observed, the possible fragility of the Gorbachev revolution is no reason to refrain from actual engagement; on the contrary, "locking in" politically binding and self-enforcing agreements now would tend to constrain any future Soviet leadership, should the political and ideological foundations of current Soviet policy change.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever truth such an evaluation may have on the political level, it consciously fails to speak to the deeper issue of the sources of change in Soviet conduct, including ideological change, and thus pleads agnostic as to the stability of change, as well as the future scope of Soviet choice. While the politician may thrive with such a levelheaded approach, the student

1 *Vestnik Ministerstva Inostrannykh Del*, no. 15 (1989), pp. 27-46.

2 I. Yanin, "Vozvrashcheniye k Prostym Istinam," *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn'*, no. 2 (1989), p. 125; Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 250; *Izvestiya*, 5 February 1990.

3 *The New York Times*, 24 October 1989, p. A13.





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of Soviet foreign relations must seek to penetrate the entire complex of considerations affecting the course of Soviet policy, including its critical ideological component. Correspondingly, one first has to come to terms with the various roles which ideology has played in past Soviet policy. Only against that standard can an accurate assessment of the nature and relative importance of ideology and ideological considerations in Soviet policy, and thus of the nature of contemporary Soviet political processes, be made.

If ideology is understood as both a set of conscious assumptions and purposes, derived from a given philosophical and political tradition, with corresponding authoritative "texts" (formal and informal), as well as part of the set of the total historical, social, and personal background of the given political leaders and citizens, we can then identify a number of functions which political ideology can serve, and which have been served in the case of Soviet political behavior. There is little doubt that in the long run it is this latter aspect, what Vladimir Shlapentokh has called "public ideology," which exercises a decisive impact on the framework of acceptable choice in a given political system. At the same time, in a Soviet-type ideological system the formal "party ideology" itself exercises an important influence on the public ideology.

Most importantly, the accepted ideology provides the *categories* with which reality is both perceived and interpreted. In the Soviet Union, where the party-state has exercised a privileged monopoly over the educational system and means of mass communication for seven decades, these basic epistemological and philosophical categories have been formed since early during school years and have been systematically reinforced throughout the individual's experience of socialization. They are deeply rooted and resistant to change, even in the face of striking changes in the existential experience and in the content of the ideology itself. Such ideologically determined categories of thinking thus tend to be very effective in shaping cognitive and analytical processes, especially over the long-term, although they are also very abstract. The basic categories of importance for the Soviet political experience fall under the general theory of materialism, as codified by Marx and Engels and later modified by Lenin, and are divided into two main subheadings: dialectical materialism, which contains both a philosophy of dialectics which Marx derived from the German idealist tradition, as well as a system of political economy which Marx again derived from the great British economists in the Smith-Ricardo tradition; and historical materialism, which attempts to apply the categories of dialectical materialism to the particular field of human relations within society. The categories which follow from these philosophical schools are indeed very general, yet for that very reason also very difficult to alter. The postulates of dialectical materialism also yield three basic "laws" of social reality: the transformation of "quantitative" changes in degree to "qualitative" changes in kind, hence the eventual development of history by revolutionary "leaps;" the "unity of opposites," which inclines one to see all social phenomena as interrelated;

and the "negation of the negation," based on the triad of *thesis: antithesis: synthesis*, which alerts one to the importance of conflicts of interests as the motor of historical change and progress.

The persistence of these mental categories, furthermore, is due not simply to their high degree of generality (becoming in effect non-falsifiable propositions), but also to their apparent fit with much of the existential world, especially when compared to competing philosophical categories such as the tradition of Anglo-Saxon empiricism and the corresponding liberal assumption of linear historical progress. From these three basic "laws" of the dialectic follow certain basic insights into the nature of social phenomena which are likely to persist well into the Soviet future, independent of the policies being pursued at any given moment. The most important of these insights, from the standpoint of mapping the Marxist-Leninist cognitive universe, are that social phenomena, as with phenomena in nature, do not exist in isolation but are rather dependent on other such phenomena; that social phenomena must be studied in their movement and development; that whenever one confronts apparent opposites, one must search for, identify, and analyze their positive interrelationship; and finally, one must look for contradiction in the processes of society as well as nature, since contradiction is the motive force behind all development. Contradictory forces, furthermore, are not generally equal; one is dying at a faster or slower rate, and is at the same time resisting the force(s) that is (are) rising.

Wolfgang Leonhard provides some striking illustrations of the effect which such categories have had on the thinking of committed communists. Writing of his time as a young functionary in the wartime and early postwar leadership of the German Communist Party, Leonhard observes that he and his comrades were not at all impressed by the obviously higher Western standard of living. "Historically," he writes of his thinking then, "declining societies have always had a higher standard of living than those which are just coming into being." Again, commenting on why the Western concept of freedom had no effect on those like himself who were secretly dissenting from the official Stalinist line, Leonhard writes:

"This opposition was conducted within our world of ideas, in our own terminology, and was concerned with our own problems. It had nothing to do with Western sympathies or Western conceptions of freedom. For us, freedom meant insight into historical necessity. We were free because we were the only ones who possessed this insight on the basis of scientific theory; whereas people in the West who lacked this scientific theory and simply confronted historical evolution with an unreasoning, desperate opposition, to the point of simply being the playthings of that evolution — these were the ones who were unfree."

Recent interviews conducted among veteran communists in the Soviet Union and in other ruling and non-ruling communist parties bear witness to the lasting grip of the basic ideological categories, independent of one's actual stance



toward given policy issues, upon the thinking of those educated in the Marxist-Leninist tradition.<sup>4</sup>

The essence of the second, "historical" aspect of materialist theory, involves the specific focus on the relationship, and tension, between the productive forces of society and production relations within society as the engine of history, with the class struggle as motif and catalyst. It is precisely economic forces which are seen as fundamental, or determining, in the nature, scope and pace of social development. Furthermore, to close the circle, these forces operate according to the dialectical principle of contradiction (thesis: antithesis: synthesis). From the vantage point of the sociology of knowledge, which is our proper concern here, the point is not to measure Marxism-Leninism in its basic epistemological aspects by the Soviet claim as to its scientific validity, but rather to view it as a mundane theory of reality which should be adjudged in terms of its ability to shape core epistemological assumptions and political sensibilities. By that standard, the basic Marxist ideological concepts have proved at least as effective in informing fundamental political beliefs, preferences, and range of choice as have many basic Western perspectives and should certainly not be dismissed as analytically inferior to the cognitive maps of non-Soviet (or non-Marxist) politicians and students of politics. Given the cognitive importance of this most general function of the political ideology, one should be careful before embracing too broadly the thesis of the end of ideology in Soviet political life, either foreign or domestic.

These conceptual/analytical aspects of ideology are often confused with its utopian aspect, concerned with ultimate purposes, with correspondingly extreme conclusions being drawn about the role which ideology plays in Soviet politics, domestic or foreign. The scope of the epistemological components of the Marxist-Leninist ideological framework is such that they operate in effective dissociation from its teleological function. The strength of the ideology lies not in any given prescription or expectation for the day-to-day world of political events but rather, as far as international relations are concerned, in the way it orients one to preoccupation with the domestic, especially economic, dynamics of societies as the touchstone of international change, and to the assumption of conflict, not harmonies, of interest as normal in political life in general and in international relations in particular. These are sensible postulates, as the course of world politics daily demonstrates.

There are other aspects of ideology to be taken into account. These operate on different levels, and some may more easily lead to dysfunctional behavior than others. For example, the natural and "filtering" aspect of ideology has in the specific Soviet context often been systematically exploited (or abused) by the ruling party-state through its traditional monopoly of the means of mass communication. While in the short-term at least the kind of filtering may be susceptible to direct propaganda, in conditions of relatively open social communi-

cation, such as that prevailing under glasnost, overt efforts to manipulate specific political beliefs (as distinct from basic intellectual categories) would appear to produce a substantial degree of disorientation and eventually a certain loss of credibility in the specific political aspects of the ideology, and hence in the political authorities. It is an open question, then, whether this filtering function of the ideology can survive the (relatively) free flow of information intact. The experience of other societies, and institutions (e.g., the Catholic Church), suggests, however, that substantial adjustments can be made in the phenomenology of the ideology without challenging its underlying ontological or epistemological foundations.

In addition to these conceptual aspects of Soviet ideology, which in their structure apply to all individuals and all institutions and societies, Soviet ideology has served more explicitly political purposes. The theory of Marxism-Leninism, which unites the cause of communism in Soviet Russia with the fate of all mankind (and thereby of "universal human values") through the vehicle of the "world historical process," has been consistently exploited by the Soviet leadership as one means by which to justify, or legitimate, the privileged position which it continues to arrogate to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union within the USSR and until most recently within the "socialist world system" as well. Until the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in the fall of 1989, such ideological considerations lay at the heart of the Soviet definition of its security interests in the region. At the same time, the existence of "fraternal" communist regimes in East Central Europe, by underscoring the international vocation of communism, served to buttress the Soviet Communist Party's claim on power within the Soviet Union itself. The best known examples of this highly utilitarian exploitation of ideology include Stalin's doctrine of "socialism in one country" (*contra* Trotsky); the Stalinist thesis of the "ever aggravating contradictions under socialism," justifying total repression; Khrushchev's declaration of the noninevitability of war, justifying peaceful coexistence and its concomitant internal policies; the "Brezhnev Doctrine" asserting ideological conformity in East Central Europe and in the Soviet Union, and, latterly, Gorbachev's "new political thinking," with its intimate tie to reform at home. The corollary to this legitimating function of the ideology is the disciplinary political purpose to which it has been put by Soviet leaders seeking to define the acceptable language of political discourse, and thereby to dominate the political agenda of the country. Changes in the specific political content of the ideology need not as such challenge this disciplinary aspect of ideological politics, which one finds in various forms across political systems. Finally, and evident to all, is the fact that Soviet ideology has been used repeatedly and self-consciously by the Soviet leadership to justify policies which may have been taken for reasons independent of ideological considerations and to affect foreign perceptions of Soviet policies. Again,

4 Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1958), pp. 483-4 and 487-8; *The New York Times*, 22 January 1989, p. A1 and *infra*.



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changes in the content of the ideology need not affect the roles which ideology performs or the purposes to which it may be put.

Soviet ideology thus exercises an important conceptual and analytical influence on the way that Soviet political man understands politics and society. On this level the ideology is rather resistant to change. Furthermore, ideology in general and Soviet ideology in particular is not incompatible with generally recognizable rational and pragmatic behavior, given the basic postulates of the ideology. Certainly, there are distortions in the Soviet ideological belief system; but this is true of all belief systems. The only relevant issue here is the degree of specificity desired and the acceptability of what is sacrificed. More serious are the effects of ideological distortion, conscious or otherwise, on the daily world of observable phenomena. As far as international affairs are concerned, the most egregious distortion, and the most easily falsifiable by events at home as well as abroad (the latter becoming generally apparent only of late), has been what has justifiably been called the two-camp view of world politics, which is based on rejecting the idea that socio-economic changes might be unconsciously taking place in all societies (including the USSR) faced with certain similar difficulties of development. The traditional orthodox Soviet thesis has been that genuine peace can only come with the final victory of a particular social system (i.e., communism) led by a particular political party (i.e., the communists), which leads to a fundamental, ideologically driven struggle for survival in international relations which has not proved conducive to long-term conflict resolution. It is exactly at this level, i.e., of the prevailing dogma on the nature of international conflict, where the most striking changes in both the role and the content of Soviet international ideology have been occurring during the Gorbachev years. That such a change took so long in coming, in the face of sustained accumulated evidence to the contrary, may be explained not by the flawed nature of Marxist-Leninist philosophy (flawed though it may be), but rather by the institutional aspects of the Soviet political ideology, i.e., the institutional commitment of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and the personal commitment of its leadership, to a particular political application of the ideology; the general difficulty of accepting new or modified values as they become engrained within the system; and the impact of Soviet international performance on the politically credible balance sheet of "costs and benefits."

It may prove helpful to recall the gist of what might be termed the "old" political thinking. In June, 1985, a usually authoritative Soviet voice ("O. Rakhmaninov") took issue with those East European states (Hungary, Romania, and the GDR) who had begun to maintain that in a time of deteriorating East-West relations, such states had a special role to play in maintaining stability, perhaps even serving as a kind of

honest broker between the Soviet Union and the United States. Rejecting such notions, Rakhmaninov thundered:

"What question can there be of any mediation between the USSR and the United States if on the key international questions the foreign policy of the USSR and of the Marxist-Leninist nucleus of world socialism is identical?"<sup>5</sup>

This passage, which may be taken as expressing the essence of the "old thinking," reflects the tight correspondence in the orthodox Soviet view between the future of communism in the USSR and the fate of communism around the world, as revealed through the "world historical process." With exceptional clarity, the statement of Rakhmaninov serves as the perfect foil against which to measure the divorce that is now being completed between the fate of socialism in the USSR and "the world historical process" that is the essential ideological contribution of the "new political thinking."

Indeed, the way in which Soviet foreign policy and security interests are now being defined and executed is changing to a most dramatic extent. These changes, captured under the rubric of the "new political thinking," have been interpreted as signifying the practical end of ideological influence in Soviet foreign policy.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the remarkable innovations in both the concept and application of Soviet international policy are happening *not* because ideology is less important but rather because it is more important than ever. It is not that ideology has become less important, but that the content of the ideology, as it affects foreign affairs, has changed, as have the ways in which ideological considerations intrude upon foreign policy. Furthermore, this shift in the two aspects of ideology — role and content — is due especially to the intensity of the present relationship between Soviet internal and foreign policies, as a change in the attributed capacity of the international system to threaten vital Soviet interests has become an important precondition for the character, scope and pace of the economic, social, and political reform at home. A less threatening international environment has become essential to all those throughout the Soviet political spectrum who are seeking to decentralize political authority, demilitarize the allocation of material resources, and in general concentrate upon the internal regeneration of Russia and the Soviet Union.

Both international and internal factors have played a part in reshaping the Soviet international ideology, although it has been the internal political and economic reform which has acted as the catalyst. The reevaluation of internal sources of power and legitimacy that constitute the essence of the Gorbachev reform has demanded, and also made possible, the assimilation of the new understanding of the international system that had been put forward by many now influential experts and officials well before the Gorbachev period.<sup>7</sup> This embraces the recognition of the constraints which nuclear weapons have placed upon both the diplomacy of states and the "world revolutionary process"; the deeper constraint which

5 *Pravda*, 21 June 1985.

6 Sylvia Woodby, *Gorbachev and the Decline of Ideology in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990).

7 Allen Lynch, *The Soviet Study of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 1989).



the unexpected prosperity, stability, and cohesion of the West has placed on Soviet international conduct; the emergence by the 1960s of a communist China as the chief security threat to the USSR; and the difficulty of sustaining political influence in far-flung regions of the Third World. To this should be added the painful remove of the Soviet Union from the international information revolution and from an increasingly interdependent and mutually profitable international economic system.

Taken together with the intrusion of a series of highly pragmatic political considerations — in particular those relating to events in East Central Europe and the absence of means by which the Soviet leadership could have exercised any restraining influence without at the same time jeopardizing the course of change within the Soviet Union itself — these factors have led to a vigorous and progressive exclusion of *traditional* ideological considerations from the conduct of Soviet foreign policy.

In the past the sound argument was often made by students of Soviet affairs that ideology played the role that it did in Soviet foreign relations because of the nature of the Soviet political order, i.e., of the institutional order of the Soviet party-state and of the distribution of political power (and position) that follows from it. Many of the actions of the Soviet party-state leadership, Leonard Shapiro observed in 1963, "...are to be explained not in terms of ideology [as such], but in terms of the one party rule which Lenin created, in other words, as a result of a necessity engendered by the organizational forms of rule which have been set up."<sup>8</sup> Of course, the insistence on one-party rule is itself strongly influenced by ideological considerations; party-ideological and party-institutional considerations are thus practically indistinguishable from each other.

What, then is the political foundation of the new ideology of Soviet external policy known as the "new political thinking"? In fact, it is far from clear. Some analysts both in and out of the Soviet Union have argued for the essential vulnerability of the "new political thinking," noting the fragility of a political and philosophical reorientation based mainly on a nuclear threat, which could — if ironically the new Soviet security policy is maximally successful — be significantly diminished, thereby undermining the very foundation of the new approach.<sup>9</sup> Thus, precisely because this new Soviet ideology that has not found its voice has yet to strike root throughout established political structures, its future is closely tied to the new structures of political-institutional authority and legitimacy, which are central to the Gorbachev reform enterprise but which today coexist uneasily alongside the old. Its fate is thus intimately connected with the further consolidation of Gorbachev's political base (which is already formidably strong) and the establishment of more effective decision-making mechanisms for addressing problems and issues of a

national — as opposed to sectoral, institutional, or local — character.

In many respects events in East Central Europe and the Soviet response to them have constituted the acid test of change in the content and role of ideology in Soviet foreign policy. Originally, Gorbachev's *laissez-faire* policy toward East Central Europe, aside from reflecting both Soviet preoccupation with its own domestic affairs and increasingly mature political leaderships (both popular and governmental) throughout East Central Europe, was apparently based on the key assumptions that communist parties would preserve a powerful say in government, and that there would be no tampering with the Warsaw Pact. In the meantime, the pace of events has forced Gorbachev's hand, beginning with the establishment of a Solidarity government in Poland in August 1989 and the subsequent collapse of Communist power throughout the region. The Hungarian government has since announced its intention to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact, which in any event is a dead letter in light of the unification of Germany on West German terms. This possibility may have been foreshadowed in an overlooked passage in Gorbachev's November 1987 speech commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, in which he emphasized "*peaceful coexistence* as a principle on which relations among socialist countries should be based." Peaceful coexistence has traditionally been the form of international relationship among class-hostile states. Its invocation may thus have been a harbinger of Gorbachev's intention to transform Soviet-East European relations to a more normal set of inter-state (as opposed to inter-party) relationships. Indeed, such a formulation lay at the foundation of the Sino-Soviet detente begun in the early 1980s, which saw a normalization of ties between communist states who were no longer allies. In the event, the Soviet leadership acceded to insistent Polish pleading and at the October 29, 1989 session of Warsaw Treaty Foreign Ministers agreed to communicate language which clearly marked the end of the Warsaw Treaty as an enforcement vehicle for political orthodoxy in East Central Europe. Whether the Treaty can survive in any form is much less important than the fact that it has been destroyed as an external ideological agent of the Soviet party-state (whose existence itself is now in question).

It can no longer be disputed, as is also clear in the case of the non-Russian nations within the USSR itself, that Gorbachev vastly exaggerated the consensus on Soviet-type values within Eastern Europe, including within the respective communist establishments themselves. (In the words of the CPSU Draft Program of October 1985, "the nationalities question inherited from the past has been successfully resolved in the Soviet Union.") Yet to have intervened at any stage of the reform process in the region would have meant conceding the argument of Gorbachev's (to date ineffective) opponents, that it is not possible to embark on the structural reform of the communist party-state system without in the process calling

8 In R.N. Carew Hunt, *The Theory and Practice of Communism* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 17.

9 Woodby, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9.



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into question the privileged place of the communists in the Soviet polity. The material and political consequences of policing East Central Europe would also have derailed the reform effort inside the Soviet Union itself. The political dynamics of his own reform have thus prohibited Gorbachev from even making the effort to intervene — politically, economically, ideologically (not to mention militarily) — in East Central European reforms and thereby to effectuate a divorce between the future of socialism in the USSR and the fate of socialism abroad, i.e., to remove the Marxist-Leninist “world historical process” as a desideratum, at any level, of Soviet foreign policy. Taken to its logical conclusion, this means that in the execution of its foreign policy it no longer makes a significant difference that the Soviet Union is also a communist state.

Our conclusions about the role of ideology, past and present, in Soviet foreign policy depend in the first instance on the level of analysis we employ. There are, as we have shown, multiple conceptual and political functions which ideology performs in Soviet political life, domestic as well as foreign. Here, one can posit substantial continuity in the content and role of Soviet ideology in foreign affairs. Furthermore, one can identify important continuities with the past in the current ideological revision which have often been interpreted as decisive signs of a break with the past. For example, the distinction that is now so often made between interstate and international relations was central to Khrushchev's and Brezhnev's concept of peaceful coexistence, which is now criticized by numerous Soviet commentators. The meaning of this distinction, which on the philosophical level remains wholly unchanged under Gorbachev, is that class-based (i.e., ideological) criteria and interests have a decidedly inferior status to traditional “state” interests in the sphere of interstate relations; the sphere of international relations, by contrast, is that in which the historical contest between capitalism and socialism as socioeconomic systems (as distinct from their separate representation in sovereign states) takes place. And in the area of inter-party relations, the principle of proletarian and/or socialist internationalism is still said to prevail.<sup>10</sup> While the whole thrust of Gorbachev's foreign policy thinking and action has served to diminish even further the importance of these latter spheres in terms of actual policy, the essential Marxist-Leninist ideological framework for interpreting world politics persists.<sup>11</sup>

Likewise, the identification of pragmatic impulses in the formulation and execution of policy cannot as such be taken to mean an absence of ideological influence on policy. Ideol-

ogy and rational conduct may be perfectly compatible with each other. Furthermore, the close relationship that is now asserted between internal and foreign policy may be taken as a truism that applies to all countries; it is only the character and dynamics of that inter-relationship, not the tie itself — which existed throughout Soviet history — that demands to be examined. In addition, any discussion of Soviet “national security” interests as something apart from ideological influence begs the point that the very concept of “Soviet” is itself infused with ideological content, and that ideological criteria themselves have often played an important role in the definition of Soviet security interests (as in the case of Eastern Europe throughout the postwar period). Finally, even the notion of “universal human values” as the touchstone of policy is philosophically fully consistent with traditional Marxist-Leninist thinking. Orthodox Marxists have always maintained that it was precisely and exclusively through the class-based historical process that genuinely human values could be realized. Only through full proletarian consciousness could man resolve the alienation from his “species-being” that is characteristic of his existence in class-based society. It should be noted that even Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, the primary official exponent of the “new thinking” aside from Gorbachev, has defended the primacy of universal human values — by which he explicitly relegates class or ideological values to second rank — as a new “general line,” valid under “contemporary circumstances.” As circumstances change, so do general lines, as they have before in the Soviet past. Politburo member Alexander Yakovlev, at the time party secretary for ideology and now the secretary for international affairs, and who himself has been a prime mover behind the “new thinking,” has emphasized the continuity in the basic Soviet conceptual approach toward international relations. The emphasis of Soviet policy on cooperation and interdependence, he told an Academy of Sciences audience in April 1987 in a key speech on ideology and the social sciences, “does not reduce by one iota the problems of ideological antagonisms between socialism and capitalism.” As a Foreign Ministry official put it in dismissing the “illusory reality” of ideological lull outside the [inter]state sphere, “the “deideologization of inter-state relations cannot, of course, cancel the struggle and exchange of ideas on the international level.”<sup>12</sup>

Until most recently, international security for the Soviet leadership also meant ideological security. If ideology was especially important in the past because of its role in defining the relationship between external and internal security, it

10 Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, military adviser to Gorbachev, has stated: “Limited sovereignty must not exist and ideology must no longer find a place in interstate relations. It will, however, survive in interparty relations.” *La Repubblica*, 22 November 1989, as translated in FBIS-SOV-89-229, 30 November 1989, p. 106.

11 For an earnest effort to square the “new political thinking” with dialectical philosophy, see V. Altukhov, “Dialektika tselostnogo mira i novoye myshleniye,” *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya*, no. 9 (1989), pp. 53-65. Altukhov is an editor of *Voprosy Filosofii*. See also “Gosudarstvennye, Natsional'nye i Klassovye Interesy vo Vneshney Politike i Mezhdunarodnykh Otnosheniy,” op. cit., no. 2 (1989), pp. 66-72.

12 *Vestnik*, op. cit.; Aleksandr Yakovlev, “Dostizheniye kachestvenno novogo sostoyaniya sovetetskogo obshchestva i obshchestvennyye nauki,” *Vestnik Akademii Nauk SSR*, no. 6 (1987), pp. 75-77; and Andrei Kozyrev, “East and West: From Confrontation and Co-Development,” *International Affairs* (Moscow), no. 10 (1989), pp. 7-8.



follows that as the character of that interrelationship is being reexamined, the role of ideology cannot fail to be affected. As one official has put it:

"The Soviet Union has always linked its security with the victory of socialism on an international scale. We believed that the Soviet Union's position in the world would be more reliable if more states were to embark on the road to socialism... This has brought about a situation when the country was drawn into a competition for world spheres of influence which requires tremendous material resources... The future of socialism should be decided primarily within Soviet society and resources must be released for the needs of perestroika, which are now swallowed by competition with the USA in the "Third World"... This is hardly acceptable in conditions of the country's grave financial and economic situation."<sup>13</sup>

This passage underscores the point that the new Soviet international ideology of the "new political thinking" is above all the product of a determined *political* effort on the part of the Gorbachev reform leadership to redefine the nature and role of the international environment for the Soviet Union in a time of profound structural change (and upheaval) at home. Certainly, new thinking provides the political leadership with a more convincing analytical framework for interpreting important international and global political processes than that offered by the reductionist ideology of "scientific communism" (i.e., attributing the sources of international conflict to the nature of particular — "imperialist" — kinds of states). At the same time, the "new thinking," by challenging existing assumptions throughout the political system, is designed to elicit better information for a leadership determined to reshape Soviet policies from top to bottom. It is also intended to provoke normally reticent quarters, such as the military, to release information and to make plain the data and assumptions upon which their claims upon Soviet resources and political attention have so long been based. This is the function which the small but growing body of civilian experts on military affairs (such as Alexei Arbatov of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations and Andrei Kokoshin of the Institute of the USA and Canada) have to date successfully performed.<sup>14</sup> Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the ideology of "new political thinking" is an integral part of the process by which the reform leadership seeks to dominate the discussion of the acceptable boundaries of reform and thereby advance its ambitious domestic program. This program, which in intention amounts to a constitutional and social revolution, obviously requires a redistribution of political power and a reallocation of resources which would be considered impermissible by the orthodox Leninist ideology of imperialism. Leninist ideology, after all, posits a persistently high level of threat to Soviet interests resulting from the *nature* of imperialist socioeconomic systems; since the nature (as distinct from the conduct) of imperialism can

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never be affected by internal or external forces — its noxious consequences can only be mitigated by its containment or abolition (by violent means if necessary) — the Soviet Union is, according to this vision, permanently condemned to the status of a garrison state so long as "imperialism" exists. Effecting the reallocation of political power and material resources that is plainly the goal of the Gorbachev reform requires breaking the stranglehold of (traditional) ideological and military interests on Soviet society, something which Khrushchev, who also sought relief from certain Leninist constraints, failed to do; this in turn requires the effective repudiation of the Leninist ideology of imperialism as the intellectual and political foundation of the Soviet approach to international affairs.

Gorbachev laid the basis of this comprehensive challenge to the Leninist ideological apparatus in his speech on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, in November 1987. Gorbachev questioned the currency of central Leninist tenets on the nature of imperialism and its ability to threaten vital Soviet interests and international stability in general. In particular, Gorbachev raised four key points: (a) whether there now existed sufficiently strong political forces internal to imperialism (i.e., political democracy) which could effectively limit its ability to threaten the peace; (b) whether militarism was a feature intrinsic to imperialism; (c) whether neocolonialism was essential to the prosperity and stability of imperialism; and finally, (d) whether it was not possible for Western political leaders to take political action based upon their apparent understanding of the universal threat posed by nuclear weapons.

In short, by dissociating, even hypothetically, the nature of imperialism from the likelihood of international conflict and thus from the threat profile facing the USSR, Gorbachev has effected a thorough revision of the Leninist tradition of international relations. The result has been not the end of ideology in Soviet foreign policy, but a substantially new one.

It is important to stress that the "new political thinking," although in essence an ideological instrument of domestic reform, has also been shaped by profound international as well as internal processes and problems. These include the full assimilation of the consequences of nuclear weapons for international politics; the prolonged economic prosperity, social stability, and political cohesion of the West; the frustrations of sustaining Soviet influence, or even socialist tendencies, in far-flung theaters of the Third World; the progressive decline of superpower influence internationally in recent decades, particularly within their respective alliance systems; and the qualitatively new level of international interdependence, which itself is related to the global information revolution, from which the USSR has been effectively excluded. To this list must be added the advent of the Reagan Administration, which shattered comfortable Soviet assumptions about the

<sup>13</sup> Igor Malashenko, "Interesy strany: mnimye i real'nye," *Kommunist*, no. 13 (1989), pp. 119-120.

<sup>14</sup> For a representative sample of their work and that of their colleagues, see the successive volumes of the IMEMO yearbook entitled *Disarmament and Security*, published since 1987.



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limits of hostility in Soviet-American relations; the electric effect which the declaration of the Strategic Defense Initiative had in causing the Soviet leadership to reevaluate the costs and benefits of its traditional approach to the East-West military relationship; and of course the defeat in Afghanistan, which severely discredited traditional ideological and military ways of defining Soviet interests. The role and interaction of these international and internal factors in pushing Soviet policy and thinking to new lines reflect processes that are well beyond Soviet control, or even easy influence. The new policies and thinking which have been produced as a result thus do not represent simple "tactical" adjustments in approach, ready to be reversed at an expedient moment. Their import, and their consequences for Soviet politics and politicians, runs far deeper than that. This has been well understood by the Soviet political class. The most prominent example is the political counterattack which Politburo member Yegor Ligachev unsuccessfully attempted to launch against the main directions of the Gorbachev reform in August 1988, when at the end of a speech in Gorky devoted to criticizing market elements in domestic affairs, he attacked the core assumptions of the "new political thinking." Ligachev vigorously denied that the admitted importance of global problems and international cooperation should relegate class values to only secondary significance in the formulation and execution of Soviet foreign policy. The "national liberation" movements, he declared, had to be vigorously supported. Any other approach, he maintained, only "confuses" the Soviet people at home and Soviet friends and allies abroad. That Ligachev was immediately reprimanded by Politburo member and chief ideologist Alexander Yakovlev, and that the Gorbachev line was strongly upheld following Ligachev's demotion in late September 1988 (and continuously since), further confirms the centrality of the new ideology of international relations in the political contest for power and values.<sup>15</sup> That this is an ongoing contest, in

which ideological symbolism is understood to play a key role, is shown by the recent entry of the Soviet military into the fray. In arguing for a greater commitment to the Soviet military, especially in the area of force modernization, Defense Minister Dimitri Yazov referred, in a speech to the Central Committee nationalities plenum in September 1989, to the "profound analysis" of the nineteenth Soviet party congress (quite at odds with its actual thrust) that "the imperialist sources of aggression and war have not disappeared."<sup>16</sup>

The political prospects of this contest are tangential to the purposes of this analysis; it is beyond doubt, however, that the end of ideology in Soviet politics can only come with the end of politics in the USSR. Indeed, in the final analysis, the chances for the new ideology of foreign policy to strike root in the Soviet system depend in the long run on the prospects of the internal reform which it is designed to advance. Above all, it will hinge on whether the social forces that have provided the occasion and pressed the need for reform can find adequate expression in the institutions, new and old, of Soviet power. That would constitute an adequate guarantee against a reversion to any kind of neo-Stalinist political-institutional order, and thus of a corresponding ideology.

*Allen Lynch is Assistant Director of the Harriman Institute and Lecturer in Political Science at Columbia University. He is the author of The Soviet Study of International Relations (Cambridge University Press, 1987, 1989); "Political and Military Implications of the 'Nuclear Winter' Theory" and "Gorbachev's International Outlook: Intellectual Origins and Political Consequences" (Institute for East-West Security Studies Occasional Paper Series nos. 5 (1987) and 9 (1989); and, most recently, of "Does Gorbachev Matter Anymore?" Foreign Affairs, summer 1990.*

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<sup>15</sup> *Pravda*, 6 August 1988; Central Television, 12 August 1988, as cited in Elizabeth Teague, "Kremlin Leaders at Loggerheads," *Radio Liberty Research*, 16 August 1988, p. 5. See also Politburo member Vadim Medvedev, responsible for ideology, in *Pravda*, 5 October 1988.

<sup>16</sup> *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 2 September 1989; see the similar and increasingly representative statement by Army Chief of Staff M.A. Moiseyev, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 11 February 1990, as translated in FBIS-SOV-90-032, 15 February 1990, pp. 117-119.